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Health

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By Andre Picard
PUBLIC HEALTH REPORTER
Second-hand smoke tied to asthma in adults

Being exposed to **second-hand smoke** in the workplace doubles a **non-smoker's** risk of developing asthma, according to a new study.

For **non-smokers** who also live with a **smoker**, the risk of developing the breathing disorder jumps almost fivefold, Finnish researchers have found.

While it has been established that children exposed to **second-hand smoke** are far more likely to develop asthma, there was still controversy about adults.

'Our results demonstrate conclusively that **passive smoking** plays a role in the development of adult asthma,' said Maritta Jaakkola of the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health in Helsinki.

The researchers studied 718 subjects in southern Finland, 231 of whom had been diagnosed with asthma as adults. None of them had ever **smoked**.

Those exposed to **second-hand smoke** at work were twice as likely to develop asthma as those who were not. Those who lived with a **smoker**, but were not exposed to smoke on the job, were at a slightly lower risk.

Subjects exposed to **smoking** at work and at home were close to five times more at risk than those who had a **smoke-free** household and **workplace**.

Characterized by an inflammation or swelling of airways in the lungs, asthma can cause wheezing, coughing and gasping for breath. It can, in the extreme, lead to suffocation. About 2.7 million Canadians have asthma.

The findings were presented yesterday in Berlin at the European Congress on Lung Disease and Respiratory Medicine.

Other research presented at the conference showed that, even as **smoking** rates decline, women are routinely exposed to cigarette **smoke**.

Italian researchers found that 47 per cent of women had been exposed to 'acute **passive smoke**' in the past week. More than 63 per cent of the exposure was at home.

Sandra Baldacci of the Institute of Clinical Physiology in Pisa, Italy, found that **non-smoking** women exposed routinely to **second-hand smoke** in the **workplace**

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saw their risk of developing conditions, such as shortness of breath at rest and obstructive lung disease, grow by 2.1 and 2.3 times, respectively. If they were also exposed to smoke at home, those risks were 2.8 and 4.2 times greater than among those living and working in smoke-free environments.

Second-hand smoke kills about eight Canadians daily. According to Health Canada, there are about 12.6 million Canadians in the labour force, of whom 4.1 million smoke. About 60 per cent of employees work where there is little or no regulation of smoking.

It is estimated that for every eight people who die from smoking-related causes, one non-smoker dies from the effects of second-hand smoke.

Research by Health Canada has shown that workers in the hospitality industry are at the greatest risk of the effects of second-hand smoke. Working in an environment like a bar can triple a non-smoker's risk of developing lung cancer.

----- INDEX REFERENCES -----

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